

## Islamophobia or Threat to Secularization? Lost Letter Experiments on the Discrimination Against Muslims in an Urban Area of Switzerland

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*Abstract:* Two explanations for discrimination against Muslims in Switzerland are threat to secularization and xenophobia. We conducted lost letter experiments and find that distinctively religious Muslim groups are indeed discriminated against, although not to a larger degree than Christian sects. Moreover, discrimination against Muslims decreases when there is no reference to religiousness. In sum, the discrimination against Muslims seems mainly to be a result of distinctive religious characteristics attributed to this group.

*Keywords:* discrimination, Islam, lost letter experiment, religion, secularization

### Islamophobie oder Säkularisierung? Lost-Letter-Experimente zur Diskriminierung von Muslimen in einer urbanen Region der Schweiz

*Zusammenfassung:* Zwei mögliche Erklärungen für die Diskriminierung von Muslimen sind der Threat-to-Secularization-Ansatz und Xenophobie. Resultate von Lost-Letter-Experimenten legen nahe, dass distinktiv religiöse muslimische Gruppen tatsächlich diskriminiert werden, aber nicht stärker als christliche Sekten. Weiter ist die Diskriminierung von Muslimen deutlich seltener, wenn kein Hinweis auf Religiosität vorliegt. Zusammenfassend scheint die Diskriminierung von Muslimen vor allem auf die distinktive Religiosität zurückzuführen zu sein, welche dieser Gruppe zugeschrieben wird.

*Schlüsselwörter:* Diskriminierung, Islam, Lost-Letter-Experiment, Religion, Säkularisierung

### Islamophobie ou menace pour la sécularisation ? L'expérience de la « lettre perdue » et la discrimination contre les musulmans en Suisse dans des contextes urbains suisses

*Résumé :* Deux explications à la discrimination des musulmans sont la menace pour la sécularisation et la xénophobie. En menant l'expérience de la « lettre perdue », nous avons constaté que des groupes religieux musulmans distincts font l'objet de discriminations, mais pas dans une plus grande mesure que les sectes chrétiennes. En outre, la discrimination contre les musulmans diminue lorsqu'il n'y a pas de référence à la religiosité. En résumé, la discrimination des musulmans semble être principalement due à des caractéristiques religieuses distinctes attribuées à ce groupe.

*Mots-clés :* discrimination, Islam, lost-letter experiment, religion, secularization

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## 1 Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Islamophobia and discrimination against Muslims and the potential difficulties of integrating Muslims into secularized societies are important political topics. Especially since the refugee crisis, but in most European countries long before, the topic has had special relevance. This is particularly the case in Switzerland. Already in 2009, Swiss voters accepted the so-called “Minaret Initiative,” which aimed at prohibiting mosques from building new minarets. Following the passing of this initiative, there was broad debate whether and why the Swiss are particularly islamophobic. Public opinion polls before the vote forecast a clear rejection, but the initiative was unexpectedly passed by the Swiss voters. After the vote, the public discussion focused on whether the Muslim population of Switzerland was really discriminated against as much as the result of the vote suggested. And if so, how this could be explained.

There were two main explanatory approaches for the votes result. Both are a form of the “identity approach of discrimination.” The first explanation was the strong secular attitude of the Swiss voters. According to this interpretation, minarets were not banned because they were a symbol of a foreign group, but rather as a public symbol of a religion that does not clearly confine itself to the private sphere, but also has political aims. Such forms of religions are rejected by most of the Swiss voters, because they are perceived as a menace to the secular Swiss state when religious and secular values become opposed (e.g. with religious vs. secular schooling). From this point of view, it is not the aspect of a foreign group that leads to discrimination, but the explicit religiousness and anti-secular aspect of that group (cf. Koopmans 2014; van der Noll and Saroglou 2015). If this holds true, similar domestic religious groups – namely fundamentalist Christian sects with political aims – should be discriminated against, too (cf. Joppke 2015). We label this form of the identity approach the “threat to secularization” explanation.

The second explanation for the prohibition of new minarets in Switzerland was that the Swiss voters are prejudiced against Muslims. Islamophobic attitudes were said to be the expression of the xenophobia of Swiss natives. Therefore, people with Muslim background who show no reference to religiousness should be discriminated against as much as distinctively religious Muslims. Following Stolz (2000; 2005) we label this form of the identity approach the “traditional world-view” explanation.

This paper uses a so-called “lost letters” design to test which approach offers a better explanation. The “lost letters” design measures real behavior in the field, while the “participants” of the study do not know that they are observed. Therefore, there is no social desirability bias and thus, the behavior is a good indicator of discriminatory behavior. The basis of discriminatory behavior are prejudices which represent the attitude of a person. Attitudes must be measured with surveys. If attitudes are

1 Thanks: We thank Benedict Borer, Lenzi Brandenberger, Heidi Bruderer Enzler, Friederike Eberlein, Laura Klüpfel and Simon Kunz.

prone to social desirability, which is the case with prejudices, their measurement might be biased because respondents try to conceal their prejudice. This process of people concealing their true attitude towards the building of minarets is likely to have happened during the polls before the “minaret initiative.” Consequently, the results of the polls were inaccurate.

One could argue that because nobody will express a socially undesirable prejudice and not act correspondingly, this could be seen at least as a measure of the minimum level of discrimination. However, this aspect is not essential, because attitudes do not necessarily translate into behavior. For instance, already LaPiere (1934) gives an example of racial prejudices against Asians being freely stated, but he also demonstrated that this did not result in racial discrimination. It follows that reported prejudices cannot even be interpreted as the minimal level of discrimination. Therefore, discrimination is best measured by examining actual behavior. This is not only true from a methodological, but also from a practical point of view. It is more important to learn about actual discriminatory behavior than about prejudices alone. Therefore, a lost letters design is well-suited for measuring discrimination against Muslims or religious groups, respectively.

Typically, this advantage of the lost letters designs of measuring discrimination in a non-reactive manner comes at the cost of not knowing who is discriminating. Due to a methodological novelty we were able to overcome this flaw of the lost letters designs. We used windshield wipers of cars as losing places and could gain information about the car holders and therefore potential finders of the lost letters from the license plates of the cars.

## 2 Theory

The theoretical analysis starts with the definition of prejudice, discrimination, and Islamophobia. Then we present two explanations for Islamophobia and anti-Muslim discrimination that are based on the identity approach.

### 2.1 Definitions

We use the following textbook definitions of prejudice, discrimination and Islamophobia (e.g. Darity 2008).

*Prejudice.* A prejudice is the affective component of a socially biased belief about some social group. The cognitive component of such a belief is called a stereotype. First, this means that a prejudice does not map some objective social reality but is generated by some social or social psychological process. Second, and more important for our analysis, a prejudice is not deliberately controlled. Rather, prejudices are – at least partly – unconscious, emotionally laden, and not accessible to rational persuasion. Third, a prejudice is an attitude and not a behavior.

Prejudices are not necessarily negative (e.g. “Asians are good at math”), although generally they tend to be.

*Discrimination.* The behavioral component of a prejudice is called discrimination. Such discriminating behavior is driven by the affective social bias aspect of prejudice. If a prejudice is negatively biased, discriminatory acts could include verbal degradation or even violent aggression. Because discriminating behavior is driven by an emotionally laden prejudice, it is not controlled by rational arguments.

*Islamophobia.* Darity (2008) defines Islamophobia as a special form of xenophobia. Xenophobia is a prejudice against foreign groups. A group can be foreign on different dimensions. In its simplest form xenophobia is directed to a previously unknown social group. Very often this is a group of newly immigrated people. In this case, foreign might also signify a foreign appearance (e.g., skin color, outfit) or a foreign religion, like the Islam.

Therefore, we define Islamophobia as prejudiced and discriminating behavior that is directed against people that are perceived as having a Muslim background (hereinafter shortened to “Muslim”). This means that we distinguish Islamophobia from xenophobia which is directed against all foreigners, as well as from racism which relies on racial differences like skin color.

This differentiation is plausible for several reasons: first, it follows analytically from the above presented categories. Second, it is congruent with allegations from Muslims that they are discriminated against as a religious group. Third, this differentiation allows adequate interventions: if Islamophobia coincided with xenophobia, effective political interventions will have to be different from those that might be applied if Islamophobia is different from xenophobia.

## 2.2 The identity approach for the explanation of discrimination

We use the identity approach to explain potential discrimination against Muslims in Switzerland. This approach starts from the assumption that people strive for a social identity. Therefore, they want to be part of some group – the in-group. The in-group needs to have distinct characteristics that make it distinguishable. In principle, this comparison can function on any dimension, as soon as the out-group is perceived as relevant. The compared characteristics do not have to be relevant. They can be mere names, like in the minimal-group experiment of Billig and Tajfel (1973, cf. also Sherif et al. 1955). The characteristics can even be completely imagined, as with Jewish out-groups in situations where there are no Jews at all. But the out-group characteristics can also be manifest. Typically, the perception of the out-group is socially biased. This allows a better promotion of the in-group over the out-group, which in turn leads to discrimination. The demand to stabilize social identity by discriminating against an out-group arises when the in-group members perceive themselves as being threatened. This corresponds directly to the foregoing definition of xenophobia as a prejudice against a foreign, that is to say, out-group.

This raises the question of, which social group in Switzerland might express a desire to discriminate against other groups, and why they should choose Muslims as an out-group. A precise interpretation of the identity approach must follow Stolz' advice to "distinguish[...] the different groups in society that have [...] varying attitudes to different out-groups" (2005, 550). We suggest two answers to this question. First, the traditionalist world-views as a classical explanation, and second the "threat to secularization" approach, especially taking certain historical, political and social properties of Switzerland into account.

### *2.2.1 Traditionalist world-view approach*

Following Stolz (2000; 2005), one can assume a traditionalist world-view as a conservative attitude. Traditionalist persons perceive change itself or anything new as a threat. Muslims, then, might serve as an out-group, because they are a new phenomenon in Swiss society. Still, it remains unclear who exactly could be likely to take up the position of a traditionalist world-view. What is sure, however, is that it must be a group of people who perceive themselves as being native Swiss. Rather vague, but testable with our empirical approach, the following hypothesis can be stated.

*H<sub>T</sub>1: Native Swiss discriminate against Muslims more than people that do not have a native Swiss background.*

### *2.2.2 Threat to secularization approach*

From the identity approach it follows that in certain dimensions, the in-group will construct differences from an out-group. In principle, the dimension itself does not matter. But, of course, one can consider certain dimensions that might commonly be the subject of the construction of differences.

One major dimension of the Swiss identity is secularism.<sup>2</sup> The founding of modern Switzerland in 1848 was to a substantial degree the result of the liberal and anticlerical movement in the protestant cantons, which culminated in a civil war («Sonderbundskrieg») that was won by the liberal side. Unsurprisingly, the consolidation of the new federation was accompanied by further conflicts between secular and religious forces. So, in 1874, by popular vote, the Jesuit order was outlawed, together with a ban on new monasteries and dioceses.<sup>3</sup> Clerics were not allowed to be members of one of the chambers of the national parliament («Nationalrat»).

As a consequence of these historical processes, the political power of religious groups – especially of the two main denominations of Switzerland, the Roman

2 The following historical facts about Swiss history can be found e. g. in the online-version of the «Historisches Lexikon der Schweiz» (historical dictionary of Switzerland, <http://www.hls-dhs-dss.ch/>).

3 A lot of monasteries and other clerical institutions had already been abolished during the revolution of 1848.

Catholic Church<sup>4</sup> and the Protestant church – were and are strongly restricted and controlled by the state. So, in most Swiss cantons there is a system of publicly recognized churches.<sup>5</sup> Thus, other religious groups are potentially not legitimated (cf. Pahud de Mortanges 2007). They are perceived as – often fundamentalist – sects in the sense of Weber (1920). Similar things happened in several European countries (cf. «Kulturkampf») around this time (Marx 2003). But in Switzerland it was not until 1973 that the ban on the Jesuit order was withdrawn by another popular vote. The exclusion of clerics from the parliament was not abolished until 1999, and the ban on new dioceses as recently as 2001. Also, due to a referendum, kosher butchering has been banned in Switzerland since 1893. The banning of new minarets by the popular vote of 2009 is in line with such anti-religious movements in Switzerland. In addition to this historical evidence, a high degree of secularism and regulation of religious issues in Switzerland has also been identified by recent quantitative studies (Fox 2008; 2012).<sup>6</sup>

Therefore, Muslims might be seen as a non-secular and not publicly recognized religious out-group with values that threaten the secular values and institutions of the Swiss society and state. Indeed, Muslims lack an overarching religious organization like e. g. the Roman Catholic Church, or the publicly recognized reformed churches in Switzerland. Instead Muslims are divided into many different groups with very diverging aims. Here we call such groups fundamentalist religious groups (cf. e. g. Altemeyer and Hunsberger 1992). In this case, and in line with the above definition, discrimination against Muslims is not the result of general xenophobia, but rather of the discrimination against a foreign – namely fundamentalist – form of religion.<sup>7</sup> This “threat to secularization approach” now implies several testable hypotheses. The first simply states that religious groups outside the publicly recognized churches are discriminated against compared to non-religious groups:

*H<sub>2</sub>: Fundamentalist religious groups are discriminated against more than secular groups.*

This already implies that from the viewpoint of the “threat to secularization approach” the kind of religion itself does not matter. This leads to the next hypothesis:

4 For the most populated diocese of Switzerland (Basel), the included cantons have the right to veto against new bishops.

5 The relationships between the state and religious groups, and churches respectively, is – as many other issues – governed on the level of cantons. As a consequence, in Switzerland, there exist different publicly recognized churches with differing legal implementations. Therefore we restricted our field work to one canton (Zurich, see below).

6 Switzerland is not a complete exception as compared to e. g. other OECD countries, but rather a typical example for a group of European countries with a longstanding tradition of secularism and governmental regulation of religion like, e. g., England, France and Scandinavia. For reasons of space we cannot extend this argument systematically.

7 This explanation allows also for discrimination against Swiss native converts. This case, though not very frequent, is highly visible in the public because these converts are often strongly involved in the religion, as preachers and the like.

*H<sub>3</sub>: Religious Muslim groups are discriminated against as much as distinctively fundamentalist religious – namely Christian – groups.*

Discrimination of Muslims should disappear if they display no sign of fundamentalist religiousness. This leads to the following hypothesis.

*H<sub>4</sub>: Non-religious Muslims are not discriminated against.*

On the contrary, if Swiss natives show signs of fundamentalist religiousness they are also discriminated against.

*H<sub>5</sub>: Distinctively fundamentalist religious Swiss natives are discriminated against.*

One would expect that people benefiting from the modern secular Swiss state, or, in contrast, are derogated by fundamentalist religious groups, should have a propensity to discriminate against religious groups. Such people could be women in general, homosexuals, animal right activists (e.g. due to the kosher butchering), and many more. We will not be able to identify such individual characteristics with our empirical approach – except for the sex of the individuals. Indeed, Stolz et al. (2016) find that people with feminist values tend to have a critical view of Islam. This leads to the last testable hypothesis.

*H<sub>6</sub>: Women discriminate more against religious groups than men.*

### 2.3 Evidence relating to discrimination against Muslims with a focus on Switzerland

Yet there exists hardly any evidence relating to the presented hypotheses. Some reasons for this were already addressed by Stolz (2005). He identifies several epistemological problems that must be dealt with in every research on Islamophobia. Two of them are of special interest here, namely: “[T]he problem of the distinction of Islamophobia and legitimate political opinion” (Stolz 2005, 549), and “[t]he problem of distinguishing Islamophobia from other types of stereotype-driven attitudes and/or actions” (Stolz 2005, 550). This is important here, because to test the postulated hypotheses we must precisely differentiate between secular attitudes, xenophobia and Islamophobia. In addition, we must distinguish discriminating behavior from reported attitudes. Because respondents might perceive xenophobia and Islamophobia as socially undesirable they will underreport it. But, as already mentioned above, the opposite might also happen.

Thus, most of the existing literature on Islamophobia does not apply to our hypotheses. Nevertheless, there is literature that gives some insight into discrimination against Muslim groups in Switzerland. In particular we will review the literature on Islamophobia in Switzerland on the interplay of Islamophobia and secularism, and on discrimination against Muslims. Stolz (2005) finds that Islamophobia is only one of several out-group phobias reported by Swiss inhabitants of the city of Zurich. Prejudices about Muslims seem to be correlated with a traditionalist world-

view. This world-view subsumes prejudices against different foreign out-groups, of which Muslims are only one, and is driven by rapid social changes. Therefore, this finding corroborates the xenophobia approach on the level of attitudes. Similarly, Hainmueller and Hangartner (2013) find that opposition to naturalization of Muslim foreigners in Switzerland is mainly driven by xenophobia.

There is also evidence for the “threat to secularization” approach. Helbling (2014) concludes that people in Western Europe make a distinction between Muslims as a group and the Muslim headscarf as a distinctively religious symbol associated with anti-liberal values. To some extent, Helbling attributes this to a growing decline of religion in general. However, decline of the headscarf and general Islamophobia are both also connected with xenophobia. So, to a certain degree, the xenophobia approach is also supported. Similarly, van der Noll and Saroglou (2015) find that attitudes against Islamic education in Germany are driven by anti-religious attitudes and to some part also by xenophobia. This finding is even stronger in East-Germany which has a stronger secular tradition than West-Germany. Note that this literature studies attitudes (prejudices, in our terms) but not discrimination. In addition to that, Stolz et al. (2016), using survey data, find that both conservative individuals and individuals embracing secular or feminist values tend to have a critical view of Islam.

There are very few studies directly measuring discriminatory behavior and not attitudes – although there is no study based on Swiss data. Using a lost letter experiment (see below) in Stockholm, Ahmed (2010) finds that Muslim persons are only discriminated against if there are monetary incentives for discrimination. However, there is no hint why discrimination happens. With no further information, this result at best might be interpreted as a support for the finding of Islamophobia. With lost letter experiments, Koopmans and Veit (2014) show that in East Berlin Islamic groups, but not Turkish groups, are discriminated against. This pattern is not found in West Berlin. Especially the results for East Germany can be interpreted as support for the “threat to secularization” approach. This approach is also supported by Adida et al. (2016). With an experimental design they find that the distinctive religiousness of Muslim migrants is a main driver of discrimination in France.

Overall, the evidence is ambivalent and points to the coexistence of both motives for discrimination. Some studies point to xenophobia and traditionalist values as drivers of Muslim discrimination, other studies support the “threat to secularization” approach. The latter is especially the case in studies that examine behavior and therefore discrimination, while the former is mainly found in reported attitudes.



### 3 Method

We tested our hypotheses in two consecutive studies, both applying to the lost letter technique. Therefore, we describe this technique first, and present both studies up next.

#### 3.1 The lost letter technique

Stolz (2005) has advocated experimental designs for research into Islamophobia. Indeed, experimental designs have two distinct advantages over ex-post survey designs: they measure the real behavior of the subjects and they allow direct causal interpretations. In experimental designs the situation of the control- and the treatment group(s) only differ in the treatment(s). So, all the differences between control and treatment group(s) which can be observed must be the result of a causal effect of the treatment(s) itself (Shadish et al. 2002). In addition, field designs with covert observation have the advantage of being non-reactive because subjects do not realize that they are being observed, so their behavior is not biased. These are the requirements of any design that allows for the testing of causal explanations of discrimination.

The lost letter technique (Merritt and Fowler 1948) uses these features as follows: addressed and stamped letters get “lost” by the experimenters. If such a letter is sent back, this is interpreted as an act of *non-discrimination*. Hence, it is assumed that the return rate of letters in a certain population measures the degree of discrimination against the addressee in this population. For this reason, the addressees of the letters are used as experimental treatments. Yet, these advantages of the lost letter technique come at some cost. Because of the fully anonymous design, participants cannot be surveyed, e.g. in order to get information about their attitudes (cf. also the next part). That is why our theoretical and empirical reasoning is focused on observable behavior.

#### 3.2 Design

We implemented the lost letter design as follows. We kept the letters identical in all aspects but the name of the addressees. In addition, to keep the finding situation constant, the letters were distributed in blocks of three (study 1) or four (study 2) (one for each experimental treatment and one control address) at the same place. This ensures that any unobserved heterogeneity of the finding situation is the same for the treatment and for the control letters. Thus, differences in return rates must be caused by the different addressees, and we interpreted these differences as discrimination against the corresponding group and/or person.

We used the known procedure of putting the letters under the windshield wipers of cars with a hand-written post-it note on it (Milgram et al. 1965). The note read “Your letter? Was lying beside your car.” This procedure possibly increased the

probability that the letter would be passed on to a mailbox for reasons of reciprocity. In addition, putting the letters under windshield wipers prevented them from disappearing in the dirt or being torn. This sampling strategy has a major advantage. In the Canton of Zurich, it is legally and technically possible to identify the name of the owner of a car from its license plate. So, we were able to obtain additional information about the probable finder of the letter and the car owner, respectively. With the help of Gabriele Rodriguez from the Center of Onomastics – which is the study of proper names – at the University of Leipzig, we could derive the cultural backgrounds of the finders. This was especially useful with names from the former Yugoslavia and Albania, respectively. While some people from those locations have a Christian background (e.g., most Slovenes, Serbs and Croatians), others have a Muslim background (e.g., many people from Kosovo and Albania). We therefore were able to categorize all probable finders of the lost letters into three groups, namely: native Swiss people, finders of the letters that were of Muslim background and the group of people with foreign roots but a Christian background. This group consists mainly of people with Italian, Spanish, Portuguese and Greek background, but it also includes German immigrants. Most of the names that could not be coded unambiguously were German or Swiss German (e.g., «Peter Müller»), and were put in a separate group. Because the male and female first names under research differ distinctively, with the help of onomastic methods we were also able to derive the sex of the car owners from their first names. With this procedure we obtained information about the sex and the cultural background of the finders of the letters.

Thus, we were able to overcome the ecological fallacy that potentially threatens the validity of the findings from lost letter experiments to some degree (cf. Koopmans and Veit 2014). One could argue that the car owner may not actually be the finder of the letter. Nevertheless, the car owners are a reasonable approximation for the – unknown – finders. Even if not all car owners drove their cars themselves at the relevant time, it is probable that a close relative or friend did. Based on the principle of homophily it seems very plausible that these people would have the same cultural background as the car owners themselves (McPherson et al. 2001).

#### 4 Study 1: Discrimination against Muslims as a religious group

In the first experiment we addressed the religious aspects of our theoretical analysis. For this, we compared the return rate for letters with a visibly distinct religious Muslim group name to those of a corresponding Christian one and both to a neutral control group.

#### 4.1 Operationalization in study 1

As the name of a Muslim group we selected «Muslimischer Kulturverein Goldene Moschee» (Muslim Cultural Club Golden Mosque). The name of a Christian group, «Kirche der Bewahrer des Tempels Jesu Christi» (Church of the Keeper of the Temple of Jesus Christ), constituted the second treatment. We chose these names because they unambiguously and immediately could be recognized as religious (“mosque” and “church”) Muslim and Christian groups (“Muslim” and “Jesus Christ”), respectively. Moreover, the form «Kulturverein» (cultural club) made reference to an often-chosen denomination of Muslim groups. The Christian name was unambiguously recognizable as a Christian sect, not belonging to one publicly recognized churches in Zurich (namely the Reformed Church of the Canton of Zurich and the Roman Catholic Church). This was necessary to test our conjectures regarding the threat to secularization approach (especially  $H_{s3}$  and  $H_{s5}$ ), that Muslim groups are perceived as being fundamentalist religious. A third name of a religiously neutral group was used as control group, namely «Verein zur Pflege alter Obstsorten» (Association for the Fostering of Ancient Fruit Species). All three groups, of course, did not exist in reality.

For all three groups the same address in the center of the city of Bern was used. Bern, as the capital of Switzerland, is often chosen as a legal address for all sorts of associations, which made the address credible.

It was not planned that finders of lost letters should open the letter. Nevertheless, this could (and did rarely) happen. In order to prevent the experiment from being detected, a suitable letter therefore had to be designed. For experimental reasons the content of the letter had to be the same for all three addressees, have no allusion to religion or any other theoretically important aspect, and it had to be credible. Therefore, a letter was designed in which a non-existing road construction firm from Zurich was informing all residents of the address in Bern that they were about to do some maintenance work in their street.

#### 4.2 Field work in study 1

The letters were distributed in the community of Zurich and in all adjacent communities. This covers an area with more than half a million inhabitants (about 380 000 in the community of Zurich and about 160 000 in the adjacent communities) which amounts to about 1/16 of the whole Swiss population. This area is the central part of the urban agglomeration of Zurich with around one million inhabitants. It is by far the biggest and economically most advantaged area of Switzerland. Nevertheless, it shows some variance regarding the dimensions of interest for this paper. The average socioeconomic status of inhabitants is high in the inner city of Zurich and decreases as one moves to the outer suburbs of the city. Inhabitants of the southward adjacent communities tend to have a higher socioeconomic status than the inhabitants of the northward adjacent communities. In addition, the acceptance of the “Minaret

Initiative” which was discussed in the introduction, varied substantially in the area covered by the experiment. While in all the adjacent communities of Zurich more than 50% voted in favor of the initiative, this happened only in one district within the city of Zurich. Though our sample is not randomly drawn from the whole Swiss population, it represents a wide part of the German speaking part of Switzerland.

Before the distribution of the letters started, we conducted a successful pre-test with six blocks (= 18 letters). After that  $125 \times 3 = 375$  letters were distributed in areas with a roughly equal number of inhabitants. For one block of three letters the experimenters chose cars of about the same class (e.g., more expensive ones) and as close together as possible. So, e.g. standing in front of a car with a letter, no other letter should have been visible to avoid making the finders suspicious. Only cars that were licensed in the Canton of Zurich were chosen. Apart from these guidelines, the letters were distributed at random over the whole area.

For each letter the exact distribution time, address and license number of the car was noted, together with a univocal code. The code was hidden as the street number of the road construction firm in the letter. This allowed any returned letter to be matched with the data relating to its distribution.

4.3 Results of study 1

*Descriptive results of study 1.* 375 letters were distributed over the analyzed area as planned. Overall 193 (51.47%) of all letters were returned. Most letters were found and posted within hours or within one day.

As expected, weather conditions influenced the return rates of the letters. When the weather was misty and rainy, the return rates were lower. This shows that dropping the letters came with some cost. On a rainy day people are not as willing to carry a letter to a mailbox as on a sunny day. Because these costs were the same for each block of three distributed letters, they didn't affect the relative return rates

Table 1                      Distribution of the finders' backgrounds and return rates conditional on finders' backgrounds (study 1)

Experimental treatment	Finders' backgrounds		Letters sent back	
	Frequency (abs.)	Frequency (%)	Frequency (abs.)	Frequency (%)
Swiss native	157	41.9	99	63.1
Christian, non-native Swiss	100	26.7	44	44.0
Muslim	35	9.3	8	22.9
Unidentified*	83	22.1	42	50.6
Total	375	100.0	193	51.5

\* Either the car owner could not be identified or the name could not be assigned unambiguously to one of the three backgrounds.

for the different addressees. More detailed analyses revealed no interaction between weather conditions and experimental treatment.

Eight returned letters were obviously opened and read. Though it is not known how many letters had been opened and *not* redirected, this gives a hint that the content of the letters was credible to the finders (and readers). So, overall, the experiment worked as planned.

From their license plates, 328 of the 375 car owners (87.5%) were identified. We managed to assign 292 owners (77.9% of the whole sample) unambiguously to one of the three groups: Swiss native, Christian background but ultimately not Swiss natives, Muslim background. Table 1 displays the corresponding numbers of the letters returned, which vary considerably. The return rates suggest that native Swiss have a higher propensity to send letters back than other subjects.

*Tests of the hypotheses in study 1.* Table 2 gives the number of letters sent back depending on the addressee. For each group 125 letters were distributed. It can be seen that letters to the secular control group were evidently more often sent back than those to the two religious groups. If the two religious groups are combined 46.8% (117 of 250) of all letters to religious addressees were sent back. This is significantly less ( $\chi^2 = 6.54$ ,  $p = 0.011$ ) than the return rate of 60.8% (76 of 125) of letters that were sent back to the secular addressees. This corroborates hypothesis  $H_{52}$  which states a general discrimination against fundamentalist religious groups that are not publicly recognized.

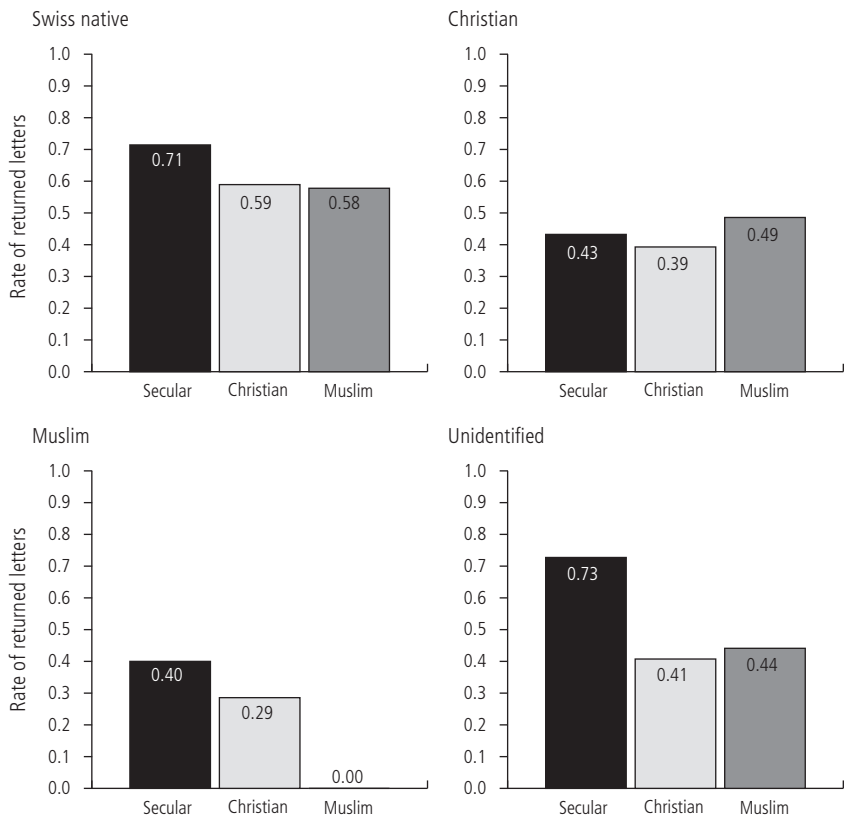
Table 2 Letters sent back conditional on experimental treatment (study 1)

Experimental treatment	Letters sent back	Letters sent back in %
Control group (secular)	76	60.8
Christian group	59	47.2
Muslim group	58	46.4
Total	193	51.5

It also demonstrates that the Muslim group is discriminated against compared to the secular control group. 18 (14.4 percentage points) letters less were dropped into a mailbox for the Muslim group, compared to those of the secular group. However, the Christian group was also discriminated against to practically the same degree as the Muslim group, and there is no significant difference in the rate of return of the letters to the Christian and the Muslim group ( $\chi^2 = 0.016$ ,  $p = 0.899$ ). Hence, discrimination was not due to the fact that the group was Muslim, but rather due to the fact that the group was distinctively religious. This result clearly corroborates hypothesis  $H_{53}$ .

Because of the block-wise experimental design, there is no need to control this bivariate result for further influences. However, to test the other hypotheses, a closer look at sub-group specific return rates is necessary. Figure 1 shows that in contrast to hypothesis  $H_{11}$  native Swiss do not discriminate more against Muslims than people without this background.

Figure 1                      Return rates by treatment and the finder’s cultural background (study 1)



With the exception of non-native Swiss people with a Christian background, individuals from all backgrounds tend to discriminate against both religious groups more than against the secular group. Yet, except for the unidentified group, which discriminates against both religious groups significantly, these tendencies are only statistically significant for individuals with a Muslim background. None of the

11 Muslims to whom a letter to the Islamic addressee was assigned returned this letter, while they returned four of six letters addressed to the secular group (difference significant with  $\chi^2=5.43$ ,  $p=0.020$ ) and four of ten letters addressed to the Christian group ( $\chi^2=0.34$ ,  $p=0.558$ ). This last finding can be interpreted differently: if we start from the above stated assumption that Muslims are a group of their own, this contradicts the identity approach of discrimination. Thus, Muslims should not discriminate against their own in-group but rather against some other out-group (from their point of view). In this case, some other approach like statistical discrimination (e.g. Phelps 1972; Arrow 1973), possibly in combination with the contact approach (e.g. Allport 1954; Pettigrew and Tropp 2006), that allows for the discrimination against the own in-group, could be a more appropriate explanation. An alternative explanation may be that Muslims in Switzerland do not perceive themselves as a homogeneous in-group, though non-Muslims may assume this.<sup>8</sup> Rather, individuals with Muslim roots might be especially aware of the advantages of a secular state, and thus might have rather negative attitudes towards fundamentalist religious groups. This again would corroborate the “threat to secularization” explanation of the identity approach. Though this last view corresponds e.g. with the above mentioned fact that there exists no overarching religious organization of Muslims, we cannot empirically decide this question with our design.

Finally, we inspected the influence of the sex on return rates and discriminatory behavior. Although women exhibit a 10 percentage point higher tendency to return letters in general, and tend to discriminate against both religious groups to a lower degree than men, none of these differences are statistically significant, at the 5% level. Nevertheless, this means that hypothesis H<sub>5</sub>6 is not supported: women do not tend to discriminate against religious groups more than men. Rather, the opposite is true.

All in all, the results of the first study support the “threat to secularization” approach, for men but not for women. Both, the Christian and the Muslim group are discriminated against to the same degree – even by individuals with a Muslim background. What is more, we do not find support for the “traditionalist world-view” approach.

## 5 Study 2: Discrimination against Muslims where there is no reference to religion

In study 1 we have established that Muslims are not more frequently discriminated against than another distinctively religious group. In a second experiment, we ap-

8 Note that in the political debate this assumption is made by opponents of Muslims who treat them as an out-group, as much as by their advocates that want to protect Muslims against this out-group discrimination.

proach the same problem from a different angle: we test whether people with a Muslim background are not discriminated against when they are not distinctively religious as stated in  $H_{s4}$ . By contrast, we examine whether Swiss people are discriminated against when they are Muslim (as stated in  $H_{s6}$ ). While the “threat to secularization” approach of discrimination against Muslims would predict that both, religious Swiss people and religious foreign people, are discriminated against, irrespective of their foreignness, the “traditionalist world-view” approach postulates that foreign people are discriminated against, whether they are religious or not (cf.  $H_{T1}$ ).

### 5.1 Operationalization study 2

To construct our treatments, we combined names of groups with names of individuals. To this purpose, we had a 2x2 design with the two factors religiousness (religiously neutral vs. religious) and background (Swiss vs. Muslim). We chose Marcel Hubacher as a distinctively native Swiss name. Muhammet Suleyman was chosen as the distinctively Muslim name. The naming of the religiously neutral club («Verein zur Pflege alter Obstsorten» – Association for the Fostering of Ancient Fruit Species) and the religiously Muslim club name («Kulturverein Goldene Moschee» – Cultural Club Golden Mosque) were the same as in Study 1, in order to keep the two experiments as comparable as possible. So, «Marcel Hubacher, Verein zur Pflege alter Obstsorten» constituted the native Swiss name/religiously neutral affiliation condition. «Muhammet Suleyman, Verein zur Pflege alter Obstsorten» is the Muslim name/religiously neutral affiliation condition. The native Swiss name/religious affiliation condition is «Marcel Hubacher, Kulturverein Goldene Moschee». The Muslim name/religious affiliation treatment is «Muhammet Suleyman, Kulturverein Goldene Moschee.»

### 5.2 Field work study 2

The field work in Study 2 only differs from study 1 inasmuch as one block of letters consisted of four rather than of three letters. 112 letters per treatment were distributed (448 in total).

### 5.3 Results study 2

*Descriptive results study 2.* Overall, 271 of all 448 letters (60.49%) were returned, which is slightly more than in study 1. We managed to identify 359 (80.13%) of all car owners from license plates and to determine the cultural background of 323 (72.11% of the whole sample) car owners unambiguously – similar numbers as in study 1. Table 3 lists the numbers of the letters returned with respect to cultural background. Swiss natives and individuals with an unidentified background have a higher propensity to send letters back than other subjects.



Table 3                      Distribution of the finders' backgrounds and return rates conditional on finders' backgrounds (study 2)

Experimental treatment	Finders' backgrounds		Letters sent back	
	Frequency (abs.)	Frequency (%)	Frequency (abs.)	Frequency (%)
Swiss native	153	34.2	102	66.7
Christian, non-native Swiss	148	33.0	81	54.7
Muslim	22	4.9	10	45.5
Unidentified*	125	27.9	78	62.4
Total	448	100	271	60.5

\* Either the car owner could not be identified or the name could not be assigned unambiguously to one of the three backgrounds.

*Test of the hypotheses in study 2.* Table 4 lists the number of letters sent back by addressee. Visual inspection suggests that background (native Swiss name vs. Muslim name) hardly matters, while religiousness does. Collapsing over group (religiously neutral vs. religious), 61.61% (137 of 224) and 59.82% (134 of 224) of the letters were returned to the native Swiss name and the Muslim name addressee respectively ( $\chi^2 = 0.08$ ,  $p = 0.772$ ,  $n = 448$ ). So Muslim groups are not discriminated against per se. In contrast, collapsing over background (native Swiss name vs. Muslim name), 65.62% (147 of 224) of the letters were returned to the religiously neutral group, but only 55.36% (124 of 224) to the religious group ( $\chi^2 = 4.94$ ,  $p = 0.026$ ,  $n = 448$ ). This again supports the general hypothesis on religiousness  $H_52$ .

Table 4                      Letters sent back conditional on experimental treatment (study 2)

Experimental treatment	Letters sent back	Letters sent back in %
Swiss/neutral	73	65.2
Muslim/neutral	74	66.1
Swiss/religious	64	57.1
Muslim/religious	60	53.6
Total	271	60.5

More detailed analyses provide similar results. Among the non-religious addressees, we do not observe any difference in the return rates between native Swiss names (65.18%, 73 of 112) and Muslim names (66.07%, 74 of 112) addressees ( $\chi^2 = 0.02$ ,  $p = 0.888$ ,  $n = 224$ ). Also among the members of the religious groups, we do not find a significant difference (57.14% return rate for native Swiss names [64 of 112] and 53.57% return rate for Muslim names [60 of 112] addressees,  $\chi^2 = 0.29$ ,  $p = 0.591$ ,  $n = 224$ ). So,  $H_54$  and  $H_55$ , which both follow from the “threat to secularization” approach, are supported.

Comparing the return rates of the two letters with the native Swiss name addressees, we find a tendency for discrimination against the addressees with religious affiliation (65.18% [73 of 112] return rate in the neutral and 57.14% [64 of 112] return rate in the religious condition), which does not reach statistical significance, however ( $\chi^2 = 1.52$ ,  $p = 0.217$ ,  $n = 224$ ). Discrimination against religious groups is more noticeable with Muslim name addressees: while 66.07% (74 of 112) of the letters were returned to secular Muslim name addressees, only 53.57% (60 of 112) were returned to religious Muslim name addressees ( $\chi^2 = 3.64$ ,  $p = 0.056$ ,  $n = 224$ ), which again confirms  $H_{54}$ .

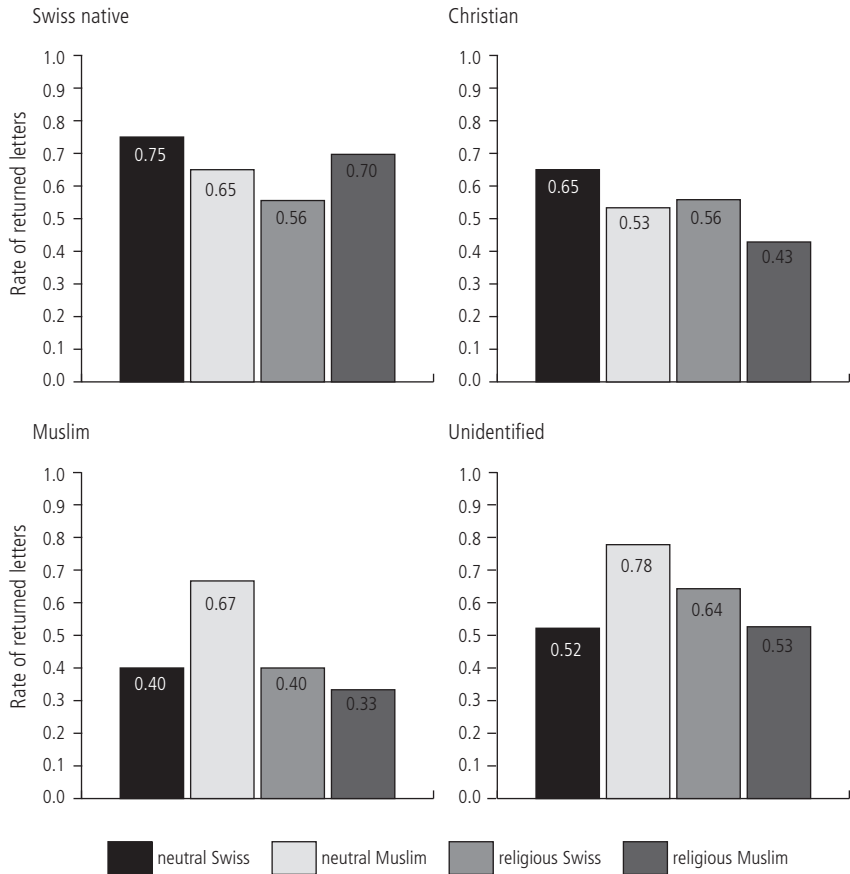
Taken together, this suggests that the cultural background (native Swiss vs Muslim) hardly plays a role, while religiousness does. Still, traditional world-views may also play a minor role. Discrimination of religious individuals is slightly more prominent ( $\chi^2 = 0.289$ ,  $p = 0.59$ ,  $n = 224$ ) for addressees with a Muslim background (53.57%, 60 of 112) compared to addressees with a native Swiss background (57.14%, 64 of 112).

Figure 2 displays the return rates for each addressee depending on the finders' cultural background. Regarding cultural background, our probably most remarkable finding from study 1 is the discrimination of the Muslim group by finders with a Muslim background. In study 2 we observe a similar pattern. 12 Muslims were assigned with a letter addressed to a Muslim addressee (six to the secular Muslim addressee, six to the religious foreign Muslim addressee). As analyses based on logit models (likelihood ratio tests for statistical differences between predictive margins, see appendix, tables A1 and A2) show, finders with a Muslim background tend to favor the secular Muslim addressee and to discriminate against the religious Muslim addressee (although  $\chi^2 = 1.28$ ;  $p = 0.258$ ). The Swiss native finders also tend to favor the secular Swiss addressee, and to discriminate specifically against the Swiss Muslim addressee ( $\chi^2 = 3.28$ ,  $p = 0.070$ ). Evidently, both Muslim finders and Swiss native finders exhibit tendencies to favor secular members of their cultural in-group while discriminating against the respective religious members of their cultural in-group. This result corroborates hypothesis  $H_{52}$  and  $H_{53}$  as well as the "threat to secularization" approach.

However,  $H_{T1}$  and thus, the "traditionalist world-view" approach is also supported to some degree because Swiss natives in tendency even discriminate against the secular Muslims (33 of 44 letters returned, 75% return rate for the secular Swiss compared to 26 of 40 letters returned, 65% return rate for the secular Muslims,  $\chi^2 = 1.00$ ,  $0.319$ ).

In contrast to study 1, women did not return letters more frequently than men in study 2 (59.6% and 58.2% respectively,  $\chi^2 = 0.06$ ,  $p = 0.799$ ,  $n = 332$ ). However, as shown already in study 1, men discriminate both religious addressees, unlike the neutral addressees ( $\chi^2 = 3.29$ ,  $p = 0.07$ ,  $n = 196$ ). They do not discriminate between the Swiss addressees and the Muslim addressees ( $\chi^2 = 0.07$ ,  $p = 0.792$ ,  $n = 196$ ). Yet,

Figure 2 Return rates by treatment and the finder's cultural background (study 2)



women do not significantly favor the secular addressees over the religious addressees ( $\chi^2 = 1.67$ ,  $p = 0.197$ ,  $n = 136$ ). Hence, as in study 1, the “threat to secularization” approach explains the behavior of men, but not of women. Analogous to study 1, we therefore find no support for  $H_{56}$ , which states that women will discriminate distinctively religious addressees to a larger degree than men, because they benefit more from the secular state. Yet, for native Swiss women we find tendencies to favor their in-group, as it is postulated in hypothesis  $H_{11}$ . To be more specific, using the secular Swiss addressee as a contrast group (26 of 36 letters returned, 72%), women discriminate against the foreign Muslim addressee (16 of 33 letters returned, 48%,

$\chi^2 = 3.97$ ,  $p = 0.046$ ) but not (or to a lesser degree) against the Swiss Muslim addressee (22 of 37 letters returned, 59%,  $\chi^2 = 1.31$ ,  $p = 0.253$ ) or the secular Muslim addressee (17 of 30 letters returned, 57%,  $\chi^2 = 1.72$ ,  $p = 0.189$ ).

## 6 Discussion and conclusion

The methodological strength of our design lies in measuring real discriminatory behavior in a natural social interaction – doing another person a small favor – and combining this with individual background information to infer causal explanations for discriminatory behavior.

We find clear evidence for the “threat to secularization” interpretation of the identity approach of discrimination. In the investigated urban area of Zurich in Switzerland, discrimination against not publicly recognized religious groups is pronounced, no matter if the groups are Muslim or Christian. This holds for native Swiss as much as for finders of the lost letters with a Muslim background. Astonishingly, Muslims tend to discriminate against religious Muslim groups even more than against religious Christian groups, and more than native Swiss do. If Muslims display no cue of religiousness, discrimination significantly diminishes. Then, there is clear evidence that – in contrast to our theoretical assumptions – discriminating behavior of religious groups is predominantly a male behavior and is shown by women to a lesser extent. Nevertheless, women also show discriminating behavior and even some tendencies of xenophobic in-group favoritism.

Our design does not allow for a conclusive explanation of the motives behind this behavioral pattern. So, we conjecture that women might have a lower tendency to discriminate against religious groups because they have a higher propensity to be religious (Stark 2002). Further, the results support our theoretical “threat to secularization” approach. This suggests that Muslims who do not emphasize their religious affiliation will be discriminated against less in everyday life (cf. Maxwell and Bleich 2014, for France). The fact that Muslims in Switzerland discriminate against the religious Muslim group most suggests that they themselves seem to have a rather secular world view. This result is validated by a recent study by the OECD (2012). This study finds that immigrants in Switzerland feel least discriminated against compared to all other countries which were also inspected (except for Luxembourg). It also corresponds with the fact that in contrast to countries of comparable size (like Belgium), history (like Denmark), and in other European countries like France, Spain, Great Britain, and Germany, there have been no terroristic acts by Muslims in Switzerland. Equally, in Switzerland there haven’t been terroristic acts against Muslims as in countries of comparable size and history (like Norway) or assaults against Muslim individuals and institutions like in many European countries (e.g. Germany, France, Great Britain). Also, there has been barely any exodus of

young Muslim men from Switzerland to fight for the so-called “Islamic State” in the present civil wars in the Middle East<sup>9</sup>. And in the last elections of the Turkish parliament, in contrast to e.g. Turkish voters living in Germany, Turkish voters living in Switzerland predominately voted for secular representatives. Overall, this can be interpreted as an at least implicit orientation towards secular values by Muslims in Switzerland. This is also corroborated by a qualitative study about Muslims in Switzerland (Gianni et al. 2010).

All in all, one could say that until now Swiss society has been comparatively successful in integrating Muslims. This happened by providing them with the liberal and secular frame of the Swiss state and the Swiss society on the one hand, and by insisting on this secular and liberal frame on the other hand. Or, in other words, the fact that the secular frame in Switzerland is widely uncontested – and eventually overrules religious claims – might be an attractive alternative for Muslims who are about to lose their religious roots and are looking for another identity (cf. Joppke 2015; Roy 2004).

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9 Cf. <http://icsr.info/2013/12/icsr-insight-11000-foreign-fighters-syria-steep-rise-among-western-europeans/>.

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## 8 Appendix

Table A1 Logit regression models – return rates among sub-groups (predictive margins)

Experimental treatment	Native Swiss finders	Finders with a Muslim background
Secular Swiss	0.750 (0.065)	0.400 (0.219)
Secular Muslim	0.650 (0.075)	0.667 (0.192)
Swiss Muslim	0.556 (0.083)	0.400 (0.219)
Foreign Muslim	0.697 (0.080)	0.333 (0.192)
N	153	22

Table A2 Wald tests for equality between return rates (predictive margins, p-values)

### Swiss finders

	Secular Muslim	Swiss Muslim	Foreign Muslim
Secular Swiss	0.319	0.070	0.606
Secular Muslim	–	0.401	0.671
Swiss Muslim	–	–	0.228

### Muslim finders

	Secular Muslim	Swiss Muslim	Foreign Muslim
Secular Swiss	0.383	1.000	0.819
Secular Muslim	–	0.383	0.258
Swiss Muslim	–	–	0.819